

VZCZCXYZ0009
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBW #0167/01 0440622
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 130622Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2182
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC

UNCLAS BELGRADE 000167

SIPDIS

DOJ FOR CARL ALEXANDRE

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [SR](#) [US](#)
SUBJECT: TRIAL of ALLEGED MUSLIM EXTREMISTS IN SERBIA

REF: A) 2007 BELGRADE 1627 B) 2007 BELGRADE 1394 C) 2007 BELGRADE
1392

Summary

1. (SBU) The trial of 14 Muslims from Serbia's Sandzak region on charges of terrorism and related charges began on January 14. According to the indictment, the group was planning attacks on the U.S. Embassy and other sites in Belgrade and Novi Pazar, as well as the murder of an Islamic religious leader. In their opening statements, defendants claimed to be peaceful worshippers who established a camp in the mountains because they were not welcome in any local mosques. Although the group does not appear to have any ties to the broader Islamic community, the trial underscores the Serbian government's need to address disenchantment and economic and social dislocation of its Muslim citizens. End Summary.

Police Find Evidence of Planned Attacks

2. (U) The trial of 14 Muslims from the Sandzak region on charges of terrorism, illegal possession of firearms, conspiracy to commit unconstitutional activity and attempted murder, in the Organized Crime Department of the Belgrade District Court (Special Court) began on January 14. A fifteenth defendant is awaiting extradition from France. The court is investigating an additional five individuals. Of those five, police arrested three in September 2007, one remains at large, and one is under house arrest in Kosovo, pending investigation by the UNMIK prosecutor.

3. (SBU) Police arrested the defendants, all Serbian citizens, who were living in a mountain camp in Sandzak near the city of Novi Pazar, in March 2007. Police had discovered the camp in the mountains in Sandzak while conducting routine operations. According to the indictment, police found weapons and evidence that the group was planning attacks on the Novi Pazar police, the hospital, and water and electricity stations; as well as attacks on several sites in Belgrade. (The investigative judge and special prosecutor told Legal Advisor and regional Legatt that police found a map of Belgrade on a computer, with the locations of the U.S. Embassy, National Theater, and Hotel Park marked.) In addition, the indictment accuses the group of plotting the murder of Mufti Muamer Zukorlic, the leader of Serbian Islamic Community, though his authority has been challenged in the past few months by a rival mufti (reftels).

The Investigation

4. (SBU) Since the case met the definition of organized crime, the Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime requested the transfer of the case from Novi Pazar to his jurisdiction. The police and prosecutor conducted the investigation professionally, and the prosecutor is

proceeding based on the evidence police collected. The prosecution does not appear to be politically motivated. The FBI, through the Embassy, has been assisting the investigation and is analyzing some of the evidence seized, including the computer hard drive and a movie celebrating terrorism. Interior Ministry official Radoslav Djinovic told Legal Advisor that the Ministry had created an anti-terror department based in Belgrade to deal with such investigations in the future.

Defendants Claim to be Peaceful Worshippers While Attacking the United States

¶5. (U) Although the media and politicians have called the group "Wahhabi," the group are self-professed Ahl-i ("righteous") Sunni Muslims, and neither the prosecutor nor the defense have used the term "Wahhabi," which the defendants said they considered offensive.

In their opening statements, six of the defendants pled not guilty and stated the weapons were for self-defense, as they felt threatened by Mufti Zukorlic's supporters. The defendants said they did not recognize the authority of either Mufti Zukorlic or the rival Mufti Adem Zilkic. They claimed the camp was a place of worship, since they could not practice in mosques, all of which aligned with Zukorlic or Zilkic.

¶6. (U) Contrary to their peaceful claims, the defendants attacked the United States Government for orchestrating the trial. One defendant, Senad Ramovic, said that "Bush and CIA agent Zukorlic" had written the indictment. Ramovic accused "Americans and Jews" of conducting the 9/11 attacks to blame Muslims. Adnan Hot said, "We know who the terrorists are, it is Bush and the U.S. Army." Fuad Hodzic said, "The U.S. Embassy will suffer punishment from Allah."

Defendants Not Related to Islamic Community Split

¶7. (SBU) The activities of this group do not appear to be related to the split in the Islamic community, although Novi Pazar mayor, Sulejman Ugljanin continues to make allegations that Zukorlic is involved. Ugljanin previously told DCM that Zukorlic was a "murderer" (ref B). Ugljanin supports Zilkic, and his attempts to tie Zukorlic to the trial are not unexpected. The press in Novi Pazar--heavily influenced by the mayor's office--in the past has published numerous claims that Zukorlic was supporting terrorists. Ugljanin's chief of staff, Fikret Niksic, told poloff on January 20 that Zukorlic was supporting extremists. As evidence, Niksic referred to the firing range supposedly located in the private university that Zukorlic founded and where he is president. In separate meetings on January 20, both Zukorlic and Zilkic told poloff that they opposed violence and extremism.

Trial Will Continue in April

¶8. (U) Trials at the Special Court are normally scheduled for just a few days at a time, because the Special Court has only one courtroom equipped for multi-defendant trials, which is shared by all war crimes and organized crime cases. A high-profile trial normally lasts over a year as a result. Only six of the defendants had time to present their cases before the trial recessed after January 18. The next session is scheduled for April 7-18, and the remaining defendants will speak then.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Government officials and the media have a thin understanding of the Islamic communities in the country, and the political rift between the two Islamic leaders' supporters complicates this. The tendency in the capital to dismiss all Muslims in Sandzak as "those Wahhabis" does nothing to address the real problems of political and economic marginalization of this region. While Sandzak does not appear to be a hotbed of terrorist activity, extremists such as the defendants in this case appear to be, could capitalize on this marginalization. End Comment.

BRUSH